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ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of a survey of students who enrolled for the first time at Salt Lake Community College (Utah) in the fall of 1998. New students included both freshmen and transfers, but excluded concurrently enrolled high school students, students who enrolled but dropped out, and those enrolled in short-term training programs. The report finds that the two most important educational goals for new students are transferring to a four-year university (42%), and obtaining a degree and immediately proceeding to work in that field (20%). The study also finds, however, that the goal and the reality are not always the same. The report presents these findings in a section entitled "Plans and Expectations Versus Statistical Realities." While 57% of all new students in 1998 planned to transfer to four-year institutions, statistics show that only 11% of full-time students who enrolled in the fall of 1995 have actually transferred. The survey asked respondents to evaluate their certainty of transfer plans in five categories ranging from "very likely" to "very unlikely." The paper suggests that the statistics may have been misinterpreted, and that perhaps those who responded "very likely" reflect the strongest degree of commitment and motivation. Differences were found between full-time and part-time low-load students in terms of aspirations, with the latter group expressing more interest in upgrading job skills and taking courses to get a job. The report also presents findings related to certainty of educational plans, availability to take classes, student employment, and concurrent enrollment. (Contains numerous tables and graphs.) (NB)

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Salt Lake Community College Fall Semester 1998 New Student Follow-up Survey Report.

Cooney, Frank

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Fall Semester 1998 New Student Follow-up Survey Report

by Frank Cooney, Salt Lake Community College,
Office of Planning and Research

Introduction

This report presents the results of the survey of students enrolling for the first time at Salt Lake Community College [SLCC] for the fall semester 1998. New students were defined as those enrolled in a credit SLCC college course for the first time. This includes freshman and transfer students. Excluded are students in the high school concurrent enrollment and the short-term training programs. Also excluded from this report are the 783 new students who enrolled, but dropped all their courses and withdrew from the College in the first three weeks of the semester.

There were 5,909 students attending SLCC for the first time in the fall semester 1998. The survey results presented are based on 813 mail questionnaire responses in December 1998 for a response rate of 13.6 percent. The following report highlights the principal findings from the survey. Student comments are presented in the appendix and organized by the respondent's reported major.

Findings

As part of the survey analysis, information was obtained from the SLCC Data Center on all fall semester 1998 new students. An analysis was conducted comparing the statistical profile of the survey respondents and all new students. It was discovered that part-time students enrolled in fewer than six credit hours were significantly under represented in the survey respondents. They comprised 25 percent of the respondents, but they were 49.2 of all the new students that semester. Further examination of the responses of these "low-load" part-time students found a major difference in both their primary objectives for attending SLCC and in other responses related to educational plans. However, their evaluations of programs and services were similar to the other students.

As a result, the presentation of findings on educational objectives takes a multiple approach. First, the findings are statistically adjusted to reflect a more representative sample of all new SLCC students. [1] Then, results on educational objectives also are separately presented for different credit-hour load groups. The rest of the survey findings are simply presented for the entire sample of respondents.

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[1] To create a total response that proportionally represented all full-time students, part-time students with six to 11 hours, and part-time students with less than six hours, it was necessary to statistically adjust the survey results on the educational objective question. To calculate the statistics on educational objectives for all new students, the response statistics for the objectives of the full-time students were decreased by .634 in the new adjusted total response; the six to 11-hour part-timers responses were decreased by .804; and the responses of the part-timers with under six hours were increased by 1.94.

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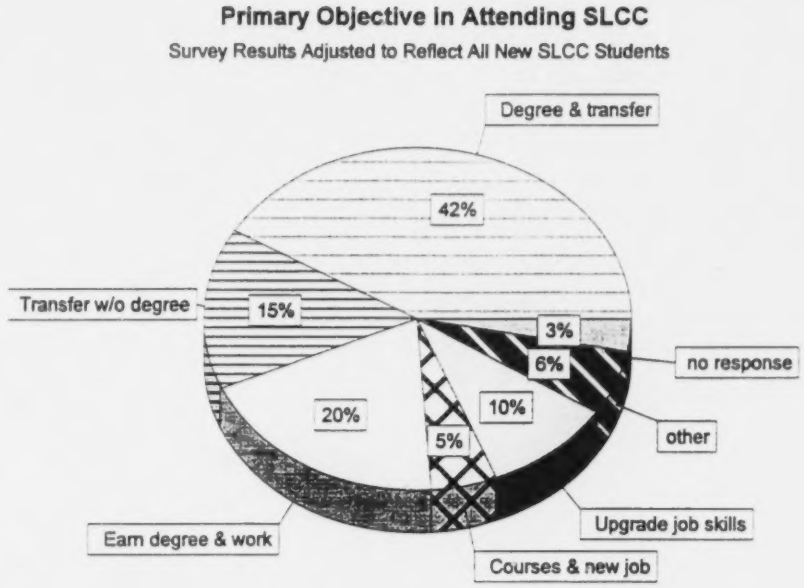
Primary Objective for Attending SLCC

Survey Results Adjusted to Reflect All New Fall Semester Students

The following pie charts shows that there are two predominate objectives for the new students: 42 percent plan to obtain an associate degree and transfer to a 4-year school and 20 percent plan to obtain a degree and then immediately proceed to work in that field. Fifteen percent stated they plan to transfer to a 4-year school without obtaining a degree at SLCC.



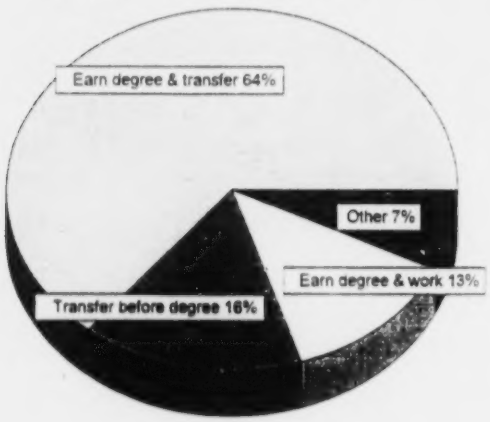
Combining both degree-seeking groups above results in a total of 62 percent who stated that they intend to obtain an associate degree from SLCC. Combining both groups above who intend to transfer results in a total of 57 percent planning to transfer. These two central statistics will be further discussed in the subsequent section entitled Plans and Expectations versus Statistical Realities. The percentage of new SLCC students stating that they plan to obtain an associate degree is almost twice as high as community college students in Washington. Only one-third of all new students in Washington said they intend to obtain an associate degree.[1]

Primary Educational Objective by Credit Hour Enrollment Group

Reporting survey responses for the total college sometimes obscures significant variations. The primary educational objective question is a principal example. The new student survey found major differences between students who were full-time and low-load part-time (1 to 5 hours). The students who were high-load part-time (6 to 11 hours) were more similar to the full-time students than the low load part-time students.

Full Time Student Primary Educational Objective

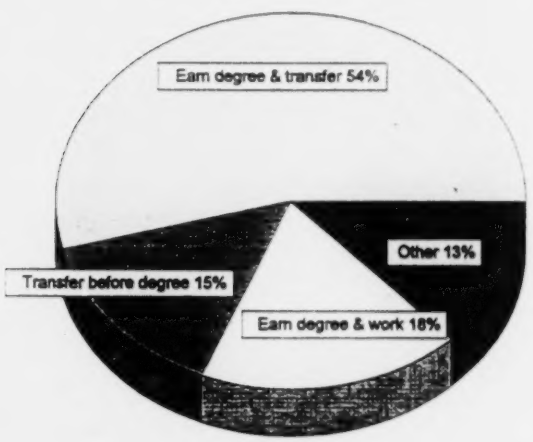
Based on 320 Survey respondents



Other: Take some courses & get a new job 1%, Upgrade job skills 1%, Other 2%, No response 3%

Part-Time [6-11 hours] Student Primary Educational Objective

Based on 260 Survey Respondents



Other: Take some courses & get job 2%, Upgrade job skills 3%, Other 4%, No response 4%

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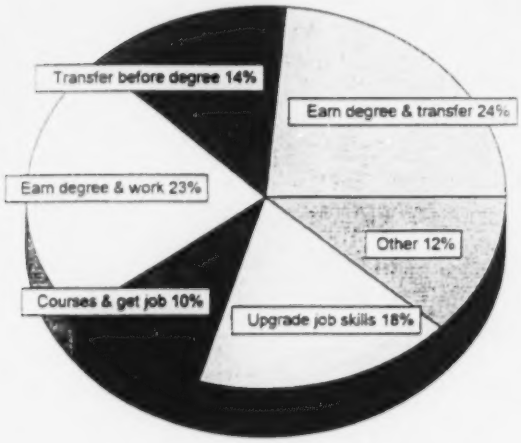
Part-Time [1-5 hours] Student Primary Educational Objective
Based on 206 Survey Respondents



Other: Other 10%, No response 2%

The variation in intention to transfer to a 4-year institution for each group is:

full-time students = 80 percent high-load part-time = 69 percent

low-load part-time = 38 percent

The variation in intention to stay at SLCC until an Associate degree or a certificate is obtained for each group is:

full-time students = 75 percent high-load part-time = 72 percent

low-load part-time = 47 percent

The two most important single educational objectives for the low-load part-timers are obtaining a degree and transferring to a 4-year school and earning a degree and then immediately going to work in a related field. Other objectives also are important:

- upgrading present job skills (18%)
- transferring without a degree (14%)
- taking some courses and looking for a new job (10%)
- and the miscellaneous "other" category (10%) which included personal interest and continuing education after a bachelor's degree.

The majority of part-time SLCC new students stated that they intend to obtain an associate degree compared to 18 percent of all part-time new students in Washington community colleges.[1]

New Student Plans and Expectations versus Statistical Realities

Both national and SLCC research indicates that there is a significant difference between the intentions of new students and their actual educational outcomes.

Associate Degrees

Combining transfer and non-transfer students results in 62 percent of all new students intending to obtain a degree or certificate. This includes both full-time and part-time students. Previous SLCC research [2] has found that the percentage actually completing a degree or certificate within three years is: full time = 18% and part time = 3%.

U.S. Department of Education research found that after 10 years the community college graduation rates were: full time = 24.4% and part time = 9.4%.[3] Applying these national results for the new SLCC students, the odds are that roughly one in four of the full-time students and one in 10 of the part-time students will ever achieve their associate degree goal.

This report also states that for students starting immediately after high school, if a full-time student does graduate with an associate degree, it takes an average of 35 months. If a part-time student starting immediately after high school is able to graduate with an associate degree, it takes an average of 56 months.

Transferring to a 4-Year School

Of all those planning to transfer, 74 percent stated they planned to earn degrees first at SLCC. Only 26 percent of those planning to transfer stated they planned to leave SLCC before earning degrees. Previous SLCC research by Janet Felker [4] indicates that, in reality, the three-to-one ratio cited above may actually be reversed. For example, her analysis of all SLCC transfers (including Concurrent Enrollment) to the University of Utah found students transferring an average of 64 quarter credits. Of the Autumn 1996 SLCC student transfers to the University of Utah, 29 percent transferred as many as 96 or more quarter credit hours with or without a degree. No information is available at this time on the specific percentage of SLCC transfers who have obtained associate's degrees.

While a very high number of new students state that they intend to transfer, the number who actually transfer appears to be much lower. Fifty-seven percent of all new students in the fall of1998 planned to transfer to a 4-year institution, but the 1998 SLCC IPEDS report calculated a three-year transfer rate of 11 percent for *full-time* students who started in the fall of 1995. The IPEDS transfer rate excludes SLCC graduates during this period (14%) who also may have transferred. If all graduates transferred, which is highly unlikely, a maximum of 25 percent of this cohort would have transferred. But when part-time students are included, research would likely find that the total transfer rate is around 10 to 15 percent.

In conclusion, why and when SLCC students are deciding to transfer before they achieve associate's degrees is a very significant question. Also significant is the question of the consequences on individual personal development and career preparation for all those students starting at SLCC with the plan of moving on to a 4-year school who never do so.

Student Certainty of Educational Plans

These respondents, in their first semester of college, indicate a fairly strong degree of certainty about their plans with roughly two-thirds saying they are likely or very likely to transfer, get a degree at SLCC and keep their present major.

Educational Objectives: Degrees of Certainty

	very likely	likely	uncertain	unlikely	very unlikely	no response
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Likelihood of pursuing a 4-year degree	52	16	15	6	8	2
Likelihood to stay at SLCC until obtain degree	45	20	14	7	11	2
Likelihood of keeping present major	47	20	17	5	7	4

Fall 1998 New Student Survey Respondents [n=813]

It is possible to view the results a different way. The "very likely" response possibly reflects the strongest degree of commitment and motivation. The other responses indicate varying degrees of uncertainty. This perspective leads to the observation that there are some doubts among roughly half of those aiming for a 4-year school and among those intending to earn an associate degree or a certificate. And barely half may keep their present major. Indications of educational goal uncertainty are very appropriate for college students.

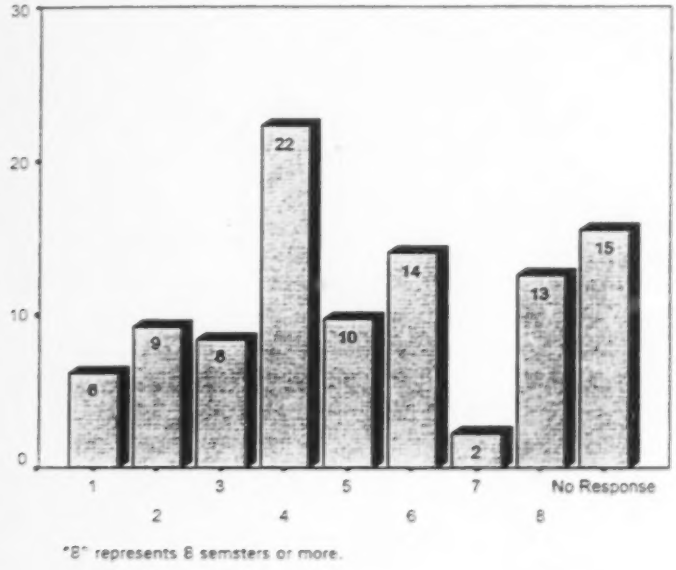
Vincent Tinto, author of *Leaving College*, views the phenomenon of changing and uncertain student educational goals and efforts as natural and a healthy human development.[4]

"Lest we forget, the college experience is as much, if not more, one of discovery as one of confirmation. More importantly, it suggests that movements from varying degrees of certainty to uncertainty and back again may in fact be quite characteristic of the longitudinal process of goal clarification which occurs during the college years. Not only should we not be surprised by such movements, we should expect, indeed hope, that they occur. Presumably it is part of the educational mandate of institutions of higher education to assist maturing youth in coming to grips with the important question of adult careers. ... an expected part of that complex process of personal growth." [pp. 40-41]

Semesters Planning to Attend SLCC

How many semesters do these new students plan to attend SLCC? The average is roughly four semesters. Six percent of these respondents already have decided that they will not return for the spring semester. Another 15 percent are undecided. It is interesting to note that only 29 percent indicated that they are staying for six or more semesters, yet, six semesters is the statistical average time that full-time students take to obtain associate's degrees. Attending SLCC part-time takes longer and greatly raises the odds that expectations will not be realized.

Percentage Responses for Total Semesters Planning to Attend SLCC



"8" represents 8 semsters or more.

The statistical discrepancy between the new students' educational goals and the semesters they are planning to attend SLCC suggests to a considerable degree that many students do not have a realistic idea of what is needed to achieve their educational and career goals.

When Willing and Able to Attend Classes?

Students were asked to identify the time periods they would be willing and able to take classes. The results are presented in the following table. For comparative purposes, spring semester statistics are provided on day/evening enrollment percentages and percentages of all sections offered morning, afternoon and evening.

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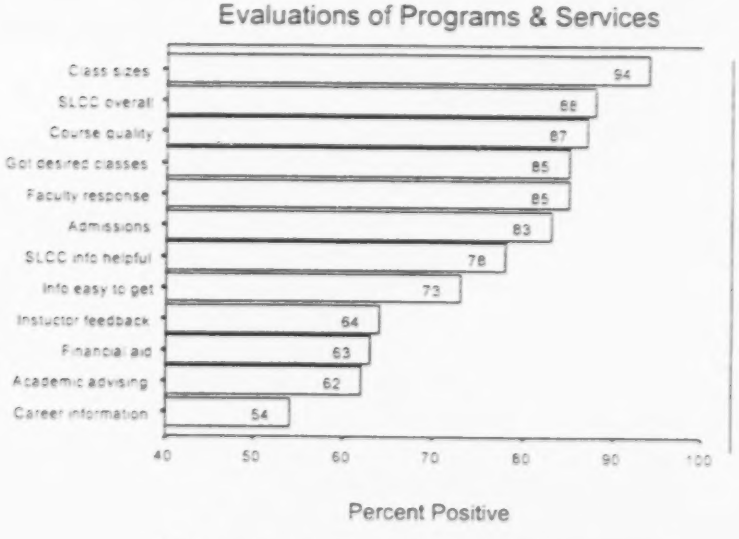
Time Periods Willing & Able to Attend Classes with Comparisons to Actual Spring Semester Time Period Enrollments and Section Offerings				
Time of Day	Percent Willing & Able to Attend Classes	Headcount Enrollment Percent	Class Sections Offered Percent	Number of Sections Offered
Morning	64	Day 69.7	48.4	1782
Afternoon	35		16.3	600
Evening	54	30.3	31.9	1175
Saturday	20		3.4	125
Total	n/a	100	100	3682

Evaluations of Programs and Services

The change from quarters to semesters raised concerns about possible problems that might affect the quality of the SLCC experience. According to these new fall semester 1998 students, things went very well. Satisfaction ratings were as high as past years on such matters as good class sizes conducive to learning, course quality, being able to enroll in desired classes and their overall SLCC experience. While there was a 10 percent drop in the helpfulness and ease of obtaining information on SLCC, there was a 14 percent improvement in satisfaction with the Financial Aid Office. In the following chart, the "very satisfied" and "satisfied" responses were combined to calculate the percent positive.



Calculations excluded "non-responses" and "did not use" responses .

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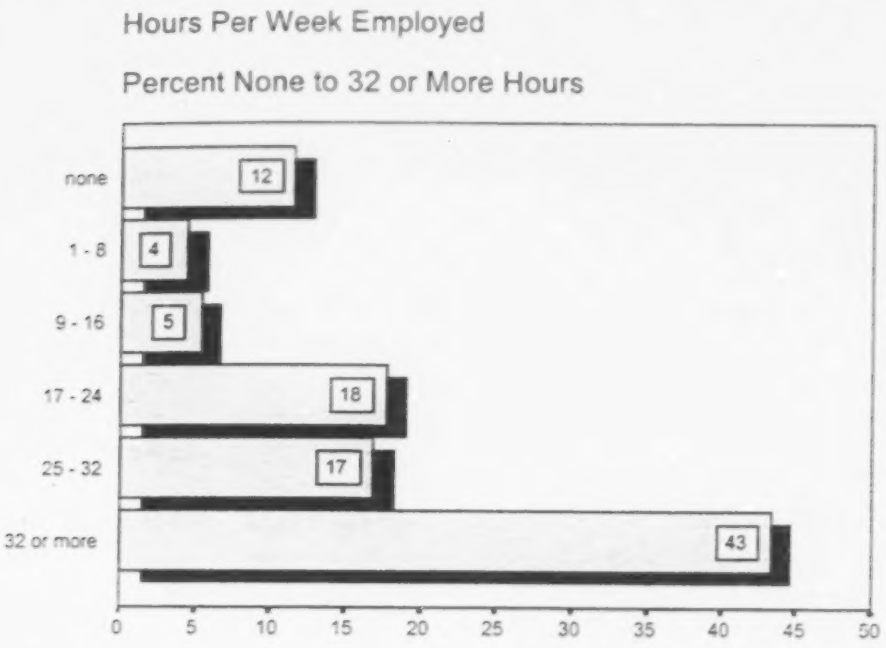
Hours per Week Employed

The employment workload of SLCC students was found to be very high. Sixty percent work more than 24 hours (3 days) per week and 43 percent work 31 or more hours a week. In comparison, a 1998 Utah Valley State College New Student Survey found that only 15 percent planned to work 31 or more hours a week. [6]



Concurrent College Enrollment

The new students were asked if they were currently enrolled at another college. Only six percent said yes [49 of 813].

Relationship of Present Major to Future Career Goal

After students were asked to indicate their major, they were asked to write in their future job or career goal. Students were allowed to indicate that they were undecided about their major. A content analysis was conducted to identify the number of students with specific goals and whether those stated goals were clearly related to their indicated major. Roughly a third [36%] of the survey respondents stated a career goal clearly related to their choice of major. Another third [36%] stated they are undecided or there was no response about their future career. A third group of 28 percent stated a specific goal, but it was not clearly related to their major. There were many different types of inconsistent answers between stated major and future goals. Some were General Studies majors, or had written "undecided", but had a specific goal related to one of the College's majors. Some had specific subject majors and wanted to be teachers. Some answers were simply a disconnect; for example, studying plumbing, but wanting to be a high school math teacher.

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Concluding Observations

The differences in the primary educational objectives of the full-time students and high-load part-time students versus the low-load part-time students were noteworthy. The results would have been of much greater significance if they had been based on the actual responses of all 5,900+ new students. Obtaining that information would allow a reliable breakdown of responses on educational plans for all college programs and majors.

The new students of fall 1998 are characterized by high expectations of obtaining associate's degrees and/or transferring to a 4-year college. The statistics indicating that large majorities are not reaching those goals raises many questions. Ongoing discussion of those questions is healthy for the college and for students. What is the significance of the choice of a major at SLCC? What are the consequences of choosing a major for the person who doesn't really know what they want? How much of the lack of success is having the wrong major? How well is the college doing to help those students who need career and/or academic advising? Does choice of major make a difference in their success if they transfer to a 4-year school?

The college experience is a time of challenges and overcoming problems, plus change and uncertainty for many students. It should not be surprising that some have an incorrect and/or incomplete understanding of how much effort is needed, including how long it takes. It could be asserted that the biggest hindrance in achieving many higher educational goals is going to school part time.

What is needed to better help students? Arthur Cohen concludes that one of the keys is strong links between the orientation, counseling, advising, tutoring and instructional programs.[7]

A Statistical Comparison of the New Student Respondents to All New SLCC Students in Fall 1998 and/or All SLCC Students in Fall 1998

In the following table, the Total SLCC Student Statistical Profile is taken from the 1998-99 SLCC *Fact Book compiled by Debbie Summers* of the Office of Planning and Research. Mary Evans of the SLCC Data Center provided the statistics on all new SLCC students in Fall 1998.

The survey respondents are very similar to the actual student profiles on the variables of primary class location and major and fairly close on age. Males are under represent by 14 percent. **A major difference was discovered between the survey respondents and the actual total new student population in credit hour enrollment.** New students enrolled in one to five hours are under represented in the sample by 50.8 percent. In other words, the part-timers with less than 6-hour loads should have twice the influence on the total results than they actually do. In a preliminary analysis of the difference in responses of the three credit hour groups, there is significant consequence on the total SLCC results for educational goals. It does not appear to affect the other questions (e.g. their evaluation of their experiences at the college). The national community college averages presented in the following table are from the American Association of Community Colleges.[7]

Subject	SLCC Student Profile	1998 New Student Respondents
Primary Class Location *	**%**	**%**
Redwood	65.6	64
South	17	19
Sandy	8	10
Millcreek	5.5	3
Other	3.9	3
Totals	100	99

* Source: SLCC Facts at Your Fingertips 1997-98

Subject	1998 New Students	1998 New Student Respondents
Fall Semester Credit Hours	**%**	**%**
1-5 Hours	49.2	25
6-11 Hours	25.7	32
12 or more hours	25.0	39
Survey no response	n/a	3
Totals	99.9	99

The national community college average is 36 percent full-time (12+ hours).

Subject	SLCC Student Profile	1998 New Students	1998 New Student Respondents
Age Group	%	%	%
Under 18		1.4	3
18-24	60.7	55.8	63
25-34	20.7	18.1	18
35 and over	17.1	22.3	16
Total	99.9	100.0	100

Based on this data, the median (half above and below) average age of SLCC students is 23.3. The national community college median average is 25. The age statistic reported in the *SLCC Fact Book* (27.01) is the mean average which is the cumulative age divided by the number of students. The mean age is affected more by the students in the upper age categories.

Subject	SLCC Student Profile	1998 New Students	1998 New Student Respondents
Gender	%	%	%
Male	53.4	56.2	39
Female	46.6	43.8	60
Total	100.0	100.0	99

The national community college average is 42% male and 58% female.

Subject	1998 New Students	1998 New Student Respondents
Marital Status	%	%
Married	18.6	28
Single	57.4	72
Unknown	24.1	n/a
Total	100.1	100

Subject	SLCC Student Profile	1998 New Student Respondents
School of Declared Major	**%**	**%**
Business	16.3	19
Community Continuing Ed	2.8	3
Humanities & Sciences	52.0	36
Technology	28.9	23
Survey Undecided	n/a	12
Survey No Response	n/a	7
Total	100.0	100

Subject	SLCC Student Profile	1998 New Student Respondents
Principle Declared Major	**%**	**%**
Undecided	n/a	11.8
Business	10.1	11.4
General Studies	35.7	10.3
No Response	n/a	7.3
Pre-Education	2.8	5.2
Nursing	8.8	4.6
Computer Science	5.5	4.3
Visual Art & Design	2.2	3.7
Accounting	1.5	2.1
Biology	1.4	2.1
Criminal Justice	1.9	2.1
Communication	1.2	1.7
Pre-Engineering	2.2	1.7
Interpretation for the Deaf	0.7	1.4
Architecture	1.1	1.2
Other	24.9	22.9
Total	100.0	100.0

Footnotes

1. Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. 1997-98 Academic Year Report. 1998. www.sbctc.ctc.edu/pub/pubayr.htm

2. Felker, Janet. Retention and Graduation Rates. SLCC Memo. 9/9/91.

3. American Association of Community Colleges. Higher Education Experiences of Community College Students. Research Brief. 1996. www.aacc.nche.edu/research/brif_96.

4. Felker, Janet. SLCC Transfer Students, 1995-96 and 1996-97. SLCC Report 3/98.

   In the 1996-97 academic year, 1,925 SLCC students transferred to a Utah 4-year school. The percentage distribution to the school was:

University of Utah	52%
Utah State University	17%
Weber State University	12%
Westminster University	11%
Brigham Young University	5%
Southern Utah University	3%

   1008 former SLCC students transferred an average of 64 credit hours to the University of Utah during the autumn, winter and spring quarters of the 1996-97 academic year.

5. Tinto, Vincent. Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition. Second Edition. 1993. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois.

6. Utah Valley State College. Office of Institutional Research. New Student Survey, Fall 1998. 1/12/99.

7. Cohen, Arthur, and Florence Brawer. The American Community College. Third Edition. 1996. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, California.

8 American Association of Community Colleges. National Community College Snapshot. 1999. www.aacc.nche.edu/allaboutcc/snapshot.